

Using Manny's notes to us:

picture of daily life

Bill & Bash

friends - his age & young ones.
- extended family - Capellos
Jan & A
Mimi & Jonell (holly
fool)
Jennifer

activities
Sports

* the non-involvement of CW's family

Daily life

pp 15, 16 +

friends

family - mine family - CW

extended family - SPF

Bill & Bash

José

Sports.

incidents

School.

odd jobs

Rech. Gardens

various school job trainings

Elliott Rose

Animal Medical

Schoolhouse Rest.

Job Corps

Colby Shire.

FUGHT

III

leaving home
Ham St.
beg lady
Job Corps

Jose'

job search

& his "new" life

(disintegrating)

Though Manny had served as a kind of older brother to Nick Cappiello, tossing endless footballs and baseballs with him, watching mind-numbing hours of Saturday afternoon sports, riding bikes and fishing off the dock, it was Ben's birth in 1986 that sparked Manny's closer relationship with the Cappiello family.

Dan and Joyce's small house was hand built by one of the Community's first members in the lee of a huge rock outcropping. It was comfortable for the two of them as Dan set up his law practice and Joyce finished her schooling to become a nurse practitioner. When Nicolas was born, he occupied the spare room. Then Lena displaced him. Dan and Joyce built a new bedroom for themselves and the kids grew into the spaces they left.

Ben's arrival added one more layer of shirts, socks, toys, books and wheeled conveyances to a home that Nick and Lena had already littered with baseball gloves, violins, sneakers, rubber rafts, Barbie dolls, board games, battery-operated robots, coloring books, nerf balls, posters, stuffed animals, snow boots, sleds, training wheels and mittens.

It always seemed to me, when Joyce would clear a space for our mugs of tea among the newspapers, envelopes and math worksheets on the diningroom table, that every item belonging to the family was, at any given moment, lost.

Joyce and I began our relationship soon after I came to live in the Community. It had been one of the original decisions of the founders of Scruton Pond Farm that no dwelling would be built in sight of another. As a result, while we were all within walking distance by dirt roads or paths through the woods, our immediate surroundings offered the illusion of sylvan isolation. But when it was necessary to borrow enough potatoes to complete a recipe or when we needed an extra body to help move a freezer or fell a tree, our neighbors were nearby and, in an unspoken covenant, always willing to help.

Our proximity also encouraged informal comings together. For instance, Joyce's diningroom, table pushed back and rug rolled up, made a convenient studio for Jennifer's twice-weekly dance class. In the familiar manner of women gathered around a task, our class afforded exercise for both body and spirit. While we danced and sweated-- Jennifer, Cherry, Donna, Ann and I--we talked about our quotidian lives. We grew to know one another.

Joyce never actually admitted that the appearance of a third child presented an insurmountable problem; she was possessed of a serene temperament that bordered on fatalistic. Still it was clear that, between her husband's rigid schedule and the demands of her own work, she needed help.

Enter Manny Weeks.

What had he already learned?

That an outhouse needs a shovel of wood ash now and then. That the kitchen stove will smoke if the flue isn't open. That adjectives go with nouns and the phone must be answered 'Isinglass Studio' between the hours of 9 and 5. He could split maple and oak. He knew how to do a laundry and hang it out. How to make French fries. He could accompany us to an art opening

and voice his opinion about what was hanging on the walls. He had stopped saying 'ain't' and he used words like 'appropriate' in ordinary sentences. He could tell time, multiply two digit figures, make a luminous watercolor from a pot of cut lilies on the table, tell the difference between a Van Gogh and a Monet, separate the garbage into glass and cans, paper and compost.

Then Joyce introduced Manny to a world I never wanted to experience again: infancy. She needed him and he loved to be needed. She taught him to change a diaper, warm a bottle, dress him or get him ready for bed. Ben adored him.

You could see it. I'd drop over on a Sunday to borrow the Globe TV section. Dan was usually reclining in front of a Red Sox game. Lena might be working on a macaroni collage. Nick, restless, would be waiting for Manny to pitch on the lawn. And Ben, still in his one-piece pajama, would be poised at the head of the stairs, ready to fling his little trusting body into the open arms of

"Maaaaaannnnneee!"

At first, if Dan and Joyce wanted Manny for a Saturday night, Charter and I stayed home. If we had plans, Jonell would stop in. What if there were a kitchen fire? What if Nick and Lena started a fight that Manny couldn't handle? Supposing Ben began to choke? The Cappiello decision to make Manny Weeks their babysitter involved the neighborhood.

But gradually it became evident that the arrangement was working. There were no crises. Manny was able to manage his position as Ben's nanny while maintaining his fraternal relationship with Nick.

He made himself at home at the Cappiello's, becoming as familiar with their domestic routines as he was with ours. He often chided the older kids about the state of their rooms, washed up a sinkfull of dishes unasked or helped with the chickens.

Dan and Joyce accommodated those moments when Manny's notion of family extended beyond their own.

"I had to ask him," Joyce told me one morning, "not to leave notes for us on letters we've put out to mail. But, "she responded to my worried question about Manny's wandering into their empty house, "it's OK that he feels free to come in. That's fine." Her patience was boundless. "Dan does get a little ruffled periodically."

"What do you mean?"

She laughed. "It's nothing, really. Now and then Manny pops up unexpectedly. For instance, the other morning Dan came out of the bathroom to discover Manny in his bedroom."

On balance, it all must have been worth it.

Sometime during that period I accepted an invitation to judge a literary competition in Pennsylvania. One of my fellow judges was a black poet from the Midwest. We had dinner together and exchanged stories. I told her all about Manny and I must have said something about his child care skills.

Suddenly she became serious, almost angry. "Never," she said, in a quiet voice that chilled me, "allow your son to take a job dealing with young children. Remember, "she leaned toward

me, "the outside sees him first as a young man with a disability. If any issue should come up about abuse, any accusation at all, he'd be defenseless."

The pleasure drained from my evening. I thought about Manny reading Ben his bedtime story, his index finger moving carefully over the printed words. The time would come when Ben would be able to read on his own, and inevitably the time when he would read much better than Manny. Goodnight. Moon.

~~THESE WOODS ARE DEEP~~

A man brought me to this place and, in the way a stalked deer might divine a safe zone in the forest, I lay down with him and slept undisturbed...nothing here to startle me awake in the middle of the night. No telephone. No unfamiliar female voice. Pleading.

I get my old little boys back for summers and vacations and they learn to hear each single noise in the silence. Sebastian understands at once. Bill later. Then Manny.

Manny knows he's arrived where he belongs. He walks the woods paths, as if he himself had blazed them, without map or flashlight. Any overcast afternoon. Any moonless night.

NOTES

1. Hi Mom & Dad I did a grat job in school today
2. I came home today and did the wood for tonight
3. I did the down stares and the up stares too OK
4. I love you Mom & Dad and see you to marrol OK By

Manny Weeks To night

1. No boudy called to night OK Mom & Dad
2. The fieres are fien to night I brout some wood in the hous OK
3. I brout my Black Book down to night so you can sigen it thank you Mom
4. See you tomeroul in the after nouen OK Mom and Dad

Manny whent with Nicky to the Barrington Basball feeld I will be back soon as pastibale OK Chart & Mom
and I did the dises and put the laundry outside on the lien OK

Dear Charter and Mom

you mad my day go grat can you put my luch \$ on the tabol OK,
and Mom superman was on TV on chiel 11 on TV
look on the back
and Mom thank you for help on my homework over the weekend. I am going to bed rigeht now OK

Mom & Dad I was thinking abot going roil skating on Friday If thats all right with you Mom & Dad becaus they are open at 8:00 intell 12:00 on Friday tomerol and Manny would like to go skateing at Happy Wheels on Friday

(LOOK UP THE "NOTE" HE WROTE WITH STICKS IN THE WOODS)

HIS TRAVELS

*

Soccer
Bear Brook
Outward Bound
Fernie
Seattle

Saturday, February 25 (year)

Dearest Maz and Charter,

I got the idea yesterday that it would be neat to send a letter home for you with Manny so that you would have a fresh account of our week with him. Because Manny is not the most effusive talker, you may never hear the half of what he's done, so I want to fill you in.

But first of all I want you to know that we're all so happy to have had the chance to get to know Manny and we love him very much. He's been considerate, helpful, honest, funny and a big surprise in many ways. More on the surprises later.

On Sat., Manny's first day here, I hardly saw him at all because Anna had figure skating out of town. So Kirsten took him around town to a basketball game at the high school, to watch Xavier's hockey game, and to just generally settle in. On Sunday Xave had another hockey game out of town so we left him & George to their hockey & the rest of us went skiing--Anna & friend, Kirsten & friend & Manny & I. We had a blast showing Manny all the trails & runs & he amazed us with his skiing prowess. On Mon, quite soon after the kids went to school, we dropped him off at the hill & then Kirsten & I were to meet him there in the p.m. That is quite a story...I told Manny to be in the lodge at 1 p.m. & we would meet him for an afternoon of skiing. Well at 1 p.m. he wasn't there. I was concerned because at this point I didn't know Manny that well & was wondering if he was lost or hurt or something. So I sent Kirsten off skiing with a friend while I stayed near the bottom of the hill looking for Manny. Anyway, around 2 p.m. I spotted him & he was nonchalant & fine. When I asked him where he was at 1 p.m. he said "skiing." Well, I was kind of mad because I had been worried & I remembered your words that if he screwed up give him heck. So on the way up the chairlift I start this lecture about..."how do you expect me to let Xavier miss a half day of school to ski with you if you can't be in a certain place at a certain time etc. etc." As Manny's head is drooping lower & lower & I'm feeling like a real shit, I start to wonder whether he might have trouble telling time--so I ask him what time he has & he says 3:15. Guess what? It was actually 2:15! Because of the time change from East to West, Manny had reset his watch, but not by enough. Boy did I feel bad. Then when I questioned Manny some more he had actually been at the lodge at 1 p.m. his time & we weren't there. Can you

believe it? Anyway, after that we never had any difficulty meeting up at a certain time & I never worried about him being on his own.

Mon night Manny went to the arena to watch Xave's hockey practice & ended up meeting 2 17 yr old boys from Saskatchewan who were here for a week of skiing. It turns out they ran into each other every morning at the hill so that when Kirsten & I would arrive at noon to ski with Manny he'd be chatting away with his new friends.

On Tues George took a few hours off work & he & I and Kirsten & girlfriends met Manny again at noon and we skied in a giant pack for the afternoon. It was such fun & the weather all week couldn't have been better. Every day Manny's skiing got stronger & he tackled new & more difficult runs. He's something else!

On Wed Xavier took the day off school & skied with Manny. There were also 22 kids from our school & 22 kids from Quebec at the hill because this was the week of our "French Exchange." That night Xave & Manny went out with some of the kids to the arcade & then to someone's house to watch a movie.

Thurs Manny was tired so we took a day off skiing & did some grocery shopping & puttering & housecleaning. Thurs night was the school dance & that's another one of Manny's surprises. Here I am worried that he might not have fun & I have Xavier assuring me that if Manny looks unhappy he will walk home with him, & what happens? Xave & Manny get invited to a party after the dance & don't get home til midnight at which time Xave bursts into our room to tell us that Manny was the best dancer in the place, never sat down for a minute, & was the total hit of the night! Manny's face was beaming as he says, "Yeah, I'm a good dancer." The only kids who came close to his dancing ability were the Quebec students which says something about Easterners. Oh, the other thing Xave said with a twinkle in his eye was that Manny dances so well because he's a "brother"--and Manny echoes--"Yeah, I'm a brother." I tell you...

Friday Manny slept late so I took him skiing for 1/2 day. That was the first day of fresh snow & Manny was skiing in powder up to his knees. When I picked him up he was soaking wet and exhausted from all the hard work of turning & he had lost a pole & cracked his goggles. Oh well--the dangers of downhill skiing...

Today Xavier slept late & when a friend came by to invite Xave to go watch some b-ball he saw Manny in the kitchen and invited him instead. So he's off again...

Some of the Manny surprises...his great voice and his knowledge of all the words to all the songs, his skill on skis, his incredible dancing, his independence, his ease with people, his appreciation of hockey and figure skating, his beautiful smile, & his quiet self-assurance. What more can I say.

As for homework. Well, whenever our kids did homework, Manny read, which I figured was good. He got into Charlotte's Web & he really enjoyed reading it. He did a math worksheet one night but I didn't push that. After all, it is his holiday.

This afternoon there's basketball & skating on the agenda so

if Manny comes home exhausted don't be surprised.

Well now it's Sunday, our last day with Manny & Kirsten, & we'll certainly miss them both. One last day of skiing, one last dinner, and a nice drive to the airport. We hate to see the week come to an end.

Love & xxxx

Annie, George & the gang

encouragingly. He didn't answer at first.

I was puzzled by this boy. At lunch he'd opened up a bit, asking questions, commenting on the things that had caught his eye. The cookstove. The rough tree that served as the room's center post. Charter's drawing board and worktable with its litter of markers and tapes. The shotgun on the beam. He spoke quickly and intensely as if gathering necessary information. He didn't smile, though, and I couldn't tell how he was processing what he heard.

"I'd better call my parents." He had the look of having made a difficult choice. I gave him the phone. He spoke in rapid Spanish, punctuating his sentences with bursts of English. He sounded very adult and sure of himself.

Yet, after Maria had driven away and it was clear that he was definitely committed to his decision, José grew anxious. As evening approached, he kept glancing at our big windows. "What kind of animals are out there?"

Manny hovered around his brother, trying to reassure him. No, there were no bears, just deer and foxes. The gun? That was only for woodchucks sometimes. No, we didn't lock our doors. Nothing to worry about.

José picked at his dinner and only half watched a couple of TV shows. I wonder if he slept at all that night, lying under the skylight listening for bears.

He came down in the morning looking haggard. He accepted a cup of coffee but nothing else. No amount of cheery patter could lighten his mood, and, despite Manny's suggestions of things to do, José remained sitting in a chair at the table until it was time for Charter to take him to Boston.

It was with relief that I walked him to the car, but Manny seemed genuinely disappointed to see him go. "Come up and stay here again," he said.

And José turned to him, hands in his jacket pockets, thin shoulders shrugged against the cold wind.

"You know," he said to Manny. "You don't have to get adopted if you don't want to. Nobody can make you."

I felt suddenly very tired.

(transition)

The reality of our decision was beginning to sink in, like the damp chill of March. The more content Manny became with the shape of his days, the more I realized how much he was changing mine. Even though Manny was almost fifteen and becoming quite familiar with the workings of woodstoves, I didn't feel comfortable leaving him alone for long periods. My flexible weekday schedule was once again bounded by bus departures and arrivals, and our weekend nights had to include taking Manny to skating or picking him and his friends up at the movies.

Charter seemed unruffled as he worked Manny into his consciousness. On the occasional evening when I'd collapse into a swamp of ambivalence, start to recite my short litany of frustration, he would flick off the light over his drawing board, put aside his tools--Exacto knife, burnisher, markers, level--to comfort me. His fingers moved along the muscles in my neck and

(April 19)

Maria Edwards brought José along on one of her visits in the early spring of 1985. Manny and José Cabrera had been separated for most of their lives, tossed in a hopper of foster homes. From what Maria had been able to discover, the brothers had been a handful for the families who'd tried to keep both of them. In the end, José went to live as a foster child in a large family; Manny was not so lucky. His early years were spent first in a group home, then in a succession of temporary placements.

"José would call me," Maria told us, "and ask to see his brother. You wouldn't believe how complicated it was to arrange such a small thing...different social workers, different schedules and rules. But José insisted on keeping track of Manny. So I'd manage to get them together once in a while. We'd usually go to Forest Park."

Forest Park: a small oasis of green and quiet in a city where Blacks and Hispanics and Anglos staked out their turf along lines as clearly demarcated as the streets. I could imagine Manny and José being little boys together in that park, fishing, running in the woods. Bless Maria for realizing how important that was for them.

"Come on out, José. This is where Manny lives." Maria's passenger seemed cautious. He opened the car door.

"Hi, José." Manny was grinning. He turned to us. "This is my younger brother."

"Hello." José shook my hand, then Charter's. His eyes darted from us to our house to the trees. Somehow the look on his face made the oaks and pines loom larger. This ain't no park, he seemed to be thinking. They really live here?

We all just stood there for a moment. "Manny, why don't you show José your room?" Charter broke the silence. They mounted the steps ahead of us, Manny in his work boots and jean jacket, José tentative in his city shoes.

He was a small, slim figure next to Manny, not at all similar in appearance. Manny's hair was tightly curled; José wore his straight black hair combed back and long. Manny's features were bold; José's delicate, chiseled. Manny's skin was the color of mahogany next to his brother's the paler tan.

"Would you guys like a sandwich?" I asked.

"Please," replied Manny.

"I don't care," said José, which I took to mean yes.

I set out a plate of ham and tuna sandwiches, a pitcher of cider and a bowl of chips.

Afterwards, Manny went off with José to the pond while we sat with Maria drinking tea and talking.

"You know José has refused to be adopted by the Leons," she told us. "They have offered many times, but he says he'd never be their real son no matter what. He's a funny kid."

As for Manny, Maria thought we'd probably be able to adopt him officially by September.

After another hour of conversation, Maria began gathering her things. The boys had returned and were taking off damp shoes. I said to Maria, "Charter and I wondered if José could spend the night. We could drive him to Boston tomorrow and put him on the Springfield bus."

"Oh how nice! José, would you like to?" she smiled at him

shoulders as he talked me down.

"You're doing great." He smoothed out the knots. "Manny's so happy. And you're still writing wonderful poems. It's O.K." he laughed. He always laughed, finally, at the life we'd been dealt. "What else would we be doing anyhow?" It was true. The business was growing slowly and we needed to attend to it daily. It kept us close to home.

"Manny's just a new member of the family. We can handle it. Imagine..." Charter's hands moved to my face, tilting it close to his. "Imagine where that kid be tonight instead..."

Friends used to ask me how I put up with an outhouse. Those same friends asked each other--I know--why another child?

"I'm in love." But more, I trusted Charter's instincts and trusted the care he took of me.

Not only was I tossed back into the orbit of the public school, this time it involved guidance counselors and reading specialists, psychologists and school boards.

Seventh grade at Barrington Middle School was clearly insufficient to Manny's needs. Our town was not wealthy, and the schools were not able adequately to shoulder crushing costs of special education. Kids with learning disabilities, kids with emotional problems, physically handicapped children all shared two windowless rooms in which beleaguered teachers attempted to cope with their various situations.

Besides these special classes in reading and math, Manny was mainstreamed into regular classrooms. He loved art and the art teacher, Bobbie Slavin, appreciated his talent. Though science was difficult, he labored mightily to please his favorite teacher, Bruce Bacon. He seemed to get on with the other kids, but his closest friends remained his neighbors, Josh and Wes.

There was no indication that another year in Barrington would advance Manny's academic progress; there was no program geared to his kind of problems; and he was already older than the eighth graders.

I spent hours on the phone with school officials in various departments trying to devise a solution that would provide Manny with a school environment in which, finally, he could grow.

The Dover school--where Barrington sent most of its students for junior high and high school--was singularly unhelpful, as though these kids from the woods were afterthoughts in the system. If there was room, I was led to believe in a conversation with a Dover High bureaucrat, Manny might be admitted to Special Ed classes. He'd certainly have very little chance to participate in school sports. "We have a very competitive athletic program." And I wasn't able to discover if he could even be guaranteed art classes.

I turned to Spaulding Junior High, a school in the old mill town of Rochester, eight miles away. This time it was not some harried and impatient administrator who responded.

On the first day of spring break, Paul Asbell, principal of Spaulding JHS, arrived at the Middle School to meet with us. He wore gray slacks and a striped tie, though this should have been his first morning in jeans and a flannel shirt. Once again, we found ourselves arranged in a circle in those fiendish desk-chairs, trying

to get comfortable, shifting in our seats like kids just before the last bell.

Paul had brought along the papers I'd sent him on Manny. He listened carefully to our concerns, breaking in now and then to ask us a question or clarify a point with the Middle School staff. He seemed interested, excited almost. At last Manny was being seen not as a problem but a challenge.

"Manny's needs are very familiar to us at Spaulding. He's by no means alone in requiring a special program. We're set up for kids like him. We have an excellent team of teachers who have a great deal of experience in these areas." Paul made it appear perfectly simple. Seventh grader Manny Weeks should enroll in Spaulding's ninth grade in the fall.

I love people like Maria Edwards and Paul Asbell. There are a few of them, in the carpeted offices of corporations, the corridors of state government, the fluorescent rooms of agencies and public schools, whose individual imaginations burn like charcoal, with an even and steady heat. They have a way of making things happen despite the inertia of institutions.

Despite the fact that Asbell's obvious conclusion would require of us another round of phone calls and letters to boards and supervisors, that there would be any number of officials eager to dismiss this course of action as unprecedented and therefore impossible, Charter and I left the meeting jubilant.

The remainder of the school year passed peacefully and Manny, much to the surprise of his classmates-for-a-day, took his place in line at the gym on a warm evening in June and received his first diploma. Wim and Jonell, proud grandparents, took his picture. We wore the checked blazer Jonell had loaned him for the occasion and a tie of Charter's that didn't quite match.

Summer: 1985

the start of our new bedroom/B&B helping (where are they over the summer & into the fall?) /)Bash takes that bus trip to Claremont via Anne Mairs after Xmas/)

the frog incident

did Manny go to 4H? Did CW & I go to Quebec City? yes (Look at journal, esp. letters to Annie)

June 24, 1985

Dear Annie:

At last we've started the new bedroom. Charter has designed a space off the downstairs closet just large enough for a bed and some built-in drawers. The way the house is sited, with those enormous

rocks on the north side and the drop-off, it's our only choice. It'll sit on cement piers (Manny's digging the holes, bless him. Thank God for teenagers with strong backs) and when it's done, it'll look as if it had always been here. Charter's architectural sense is really amazing considering he has had zero training. And each addition gets a little classier!

Bill and Sebastian are here for the summer again. I love it. They're both living in Portsmouth and we all hang out together a lot. Weekends Charter presses them into service banging nails and working in the garden.

Did I ever tell you the story about Bill and the garden? He was about 16 and coming to blows with Charter over practically everything, especially weeding. Needless to say, neither he nor his brother took the kind of pleasure Charter did in rescuing baby carrot plants and spindly tomatoes from the witchgrass. But, despite all the sparring, they were becoming real friends. Anyhow, one day Bill burst into the house. "Charter, guess what I found in Rochester?" He was beaming. "Right on the corner of South Main Street there's this huge building. You go in and--this is amazing--along three walls there are big bins of beets and lettuce and radishes and onions...every vegetable you can imagine...all picked! You just fill up your cart with whatever you want!"

Annie, am I terrible to compare Manny's slow, often uncomprehending self to my other two boys? Will there come a time when Manny will be fun? Does it matter?

It's obvious, though, that Bill and Bash spark their new brother. When Bill's around, Manny makes the most extraordinary watercolors. You know, if all the art he produced resulted from school classes, you'd never know what a gift he has. He happily completes assignments that end up looking tortured and unimaginative. But when he paints with Bill--the two of them chatting and listening to reggae--his brush creates still lifes worthy of Monet (Manny's favorite painter). I'll send you the next one he does. You won't believe it.

Bill takes him to Friendly's for shakes and he shoots baskets in the yard with Bash. Well, I've sensed it for years, ever since my divorce: in the long run, sibling relationships are the ones that really count. Do you think I could hire B & B to stay here as professional brothers?

Charter and I are going on our first vacation since Manny arrived. We'll spend a week in Qu**+**béc City while Manny goes to 4-H camp. I can't wait.

Thanks for your long letter. When will we see each other?

Love to George and the kids. Tell Julian The Godmother is beginning to shop for his birthday.

(Manny's relationship with the Cappiellos)

Though Manny had served as a kind of older brother to Nick Cappiello, tossing endless footballs and baseballs with him, watching mind-numbing hours of Saturday afternoon sports, riding bikes and fishing off the dock, it was Ben's birth in 1986 that sparked Manny's closer relationship with the Cappiello family.

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Community's first members in the lee of a huge rock outcropping. It was comfortable for the two of them as Dan set up his law practice and Joyce finished her schooling to become a nurse practitioner. When Nicolas was born, he occupied the spare room. Then Lena displaced him. Dan and Joyce built a new bedroom for themselves and the kids grew into the spaces they left.

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Joyce and I began our relationship soon after I came to live in the Community. It had been one of the original decisions of the founders of Scruton Pond Farm that no dwelling would be built in sight of another. As a result, while we were all within walking distance by dirt roads or paths through the woods, our immediate surroundings offered the illusion of sylvan isolation. But when it was necessary to borrow enough potatoes to complete a recipe or when we needed an extra body to help move a freezer or fell a tree, our neighbors were nearby and, in an unspoken covenant, always willing to help.

Our proximity also encouraged informal comings together. For instance, Joyce's diningroom, table pushed back and rug rolled up, made a convenient studio for Jennifer's twice-weekly dance class. In the familiar manner of women gathered around a task, our class afforded exercise for both body and spirit. While we danced and sweated-- Jennifer, Cherry, Donna, Ann and I--we talked about our quotidian lives. We grew to know one another.

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He made himself at home at the Cappiello's, becoming as familiar with their domestic routines as he was with ours. He often chided the older kids about the state of their rooms, washed up a sinkfull of dishes unasked or helped with the chickens.

Dan and Joyce accommodated those moments when Manny's notion of family extended beyond their own.

"I had to ask him," Joyce told me one morning, "not to leave notes for us on letters we've put out to mail. But, "she responded to my worried question about Manny's wandering into their empty house, "it's OK that he feels free to come in. That's fine." Her patience was boundless. "Dan does get a little ruffled periodically."

"What do you mean?"

She laughed. "It's nothing, really. Now and then Manny pops up unexpectedly. For instance, the other morning Dan came out of the bathroom to discover Manny in his bedroom."

On balance, it all must have been worth it.

Sometime during that period I accepted an invitation to judge a literary competition in Pennsylvania. One of my fellow judges was a black poet from the Midwest. We had dinner together and exchanged stories. I told her all about Manny and I must have said something about his child care skills.

Suddenly she became serious, almost angry. "Never," she said, in a quiet voice that chilled me, "allow your son to take a job dealing with young children. Remember, "she leaned toward me, "the outside sees him first as a young man with a disability. If any issue should come up about abuse, any accusation at all, he'd be defenseless."

The pleasure drained from my evening. I thought about Manny reading Ben his bedtime story, his index finger moving carefully over the printed words. The time would come when Ben would be able to read on his own, and inevitably the time when he would read much better than Manny. Goodnight. Moon.

The singular twilight din of spring peepers had given way to the velvet crush of early summer sounds. Honey bees gossiped in quince blossoms like teenagers at a prom. Phoebes worried the eaves and overhangs, started nests that would soon erupt in dawn cacophonies outside our bedroom window. The swamp maples reddened and slowed the wind to a sigh. Golden-eyed frogs had returned to the little fish pond in Charter's Japanese garden where they belched contentedly among the stones and sprouting arrow weed.

We walked back home from a Sunday morning visit, through transparent veils of mayflies, past sudden bursts of painted trillium, inhaling the admixture of damp leaves and pine pitch peculiar to that time of year, listening to jays and towhees competing for airtime. We heard the laughter of children and went toward the sound.

As we approached, we could separate the skein of voices into the individual threads of Manny, little Ben and Jason. Their happy shouts had a rhythm, like cheers.

Smiling, full of the kind of romantic flush that June encourages, we encountered the happy boys...

...just as the frog completed its splayed arc and was hurtling downward, like a circus acrobat who'd missed the bar, into the shimmering algae net of the fish pond.

Manny retrieved the twitching creature and, to the delight of his pre-school audience, lofted it back into the sky.

I was a frozen spectator unable to comprehend the terrible reality of what was playing itself out before me. It was Charter who turned, strode to the shed, brought out the long-handled spade and handed it to Manny.

"Kill it."

Now and then the awesome reality of what we'd done disturbed but still the summer (unfolded) as it always had (the boys, etc.) and moved into September, etc.

(1985 moments up to SJHS)

first attempt to quit smoking (Feb)

BAND/VFP

voiceovers / AIS / Barrington Library Trustee / Police Committee

Bill makes image of watchbaby

clients: Jan/Lydall/Alan Wilson/Lydall newsletter/Hampshire/OASIS

May 19 Currier show...biker

Bash arrives

Kay Whidden tutoring

July 1-13 4-H

Bill arrives

HIS TRAVELS

*

Soccer
Bear Brook
Outward Bound
Ferne
Seattle

Saturday, February 25 (year)

Dearest Maz and Charter,
I got the idea yesterday that it would be neat to send a letter home for you with Manny so that you would have a fresh account of our week with him. Because Manny is not the most effusive talker, you may never hear the half of what he's done, so I want to fill you in. But first of all I want you to know that we're all so happy to have had the chance to get to know Manny and we love him very much. He's been considerate, helpful, honest, funny and a big surprise in many ways. More on the surprises later.

Love & xxxxs,
Annie & George & the gang

*

Sister who was my shadow. My second. The one I could banish to her room with my terrible threats. Who sat in her plaid wool bathrobe, silent and tearful at the top of the stairs, listening to me explain how she was sick, unable to join my party. Sister who went away to Canada and fell in love. Married the man, bore two children and rescued two more. Sister, child amongst ten who understood the notion of family better, even, than our diligent, beleaguered parents.

*

1987

Health General Outline - Chapters

1, 2, 3, 14, 15, 16

Self (pgs. 5 to 15)

self-concept

self-knowledge

physical health

mental-emotional health

social health

relationships with others

dreams

defense mechanisms

displacement

projection

introjection

rationalization

compensation

values

maturity

goal-setting

self-discipline

Yesterday, as I finished putting up the first crop of green beans and was scraping bean ends from a colander into the plastic compost bucket, I remembered Manny saying, in the deliberate way he has when he's been thinking about something for a long time (in this case, three and a half years), "Mom, why do we dump the compost into the barrel?"

Manny hasn't been in touch with us for almost a month. I hear from his brother, who hears from Donald who spoke to Skip, that Manny's eating at the Dover Friendly Kitchen two evenings a week and that he's getting pants from some organization that clothes the naked.

"He looks dumb," was how José put it. "I drove over to Ham Street on Thursday. Manny was sitting on a porch with this old guy. He pretended he didn't see me. He had his hand over his face...you know how he does when he doesn't want you to see him...but I stopped anyway. I couldn't believe how he looked. His jeans didn't even come down to his socks!"

José was drinking a beer on our porch in his pressed white jeans, new baby on his lap, and Sara looking at him like a wife.

"I took him home and asked him to spend the night, but he left when Sara was upstairs putting Emily to bed."

We're talking about his brother, the boy who used to dress carefully, matching purple and black checked flannel shirt to black jeans, mauve socks. The boy who knew he didn't look good in any shade of brown, who routinely remarked on other people's style.

"You look great tonight, Manny," Charter'd say, as Manny was leaving the house for a night of roller skating.

"Thanks, Chart. I always look great." Gentle. Assured. Happy.

Manny had his own aesthetic about chores too. He stacked cordwood perfectly. "For God's sake, don't pay him by the hour!" Charter used to warn our philanthropic neighbors. He raked oak leaves into beautiful symmetrical piles for burning and laid manure on the garden in tablespoons no matter how clear we were about just forking the stuff randomly across the rows.

In painting after painting, he detailed daylilies or the bunches of basil and parsley and black eyed susans I stuffed into glass milkbottles on the diningroom table.

Manny noticed everything, even the pink moth beating its wings against the little panes of the kitchen window. So when he asked me about the compost dumping--that daily routine we'd practiced long before he arrived in our house and one which, like so many other tasks, we all performed by rote--I was only surprised it had taken so long.

"All the stuff we don't eat can go into the barrel. It sits there and kind of cooks. When we have enough, we put it back on the garden and it helps the soil feed new plants."

"That's a great idea!" Manny said.

These late summer days Manny's not stacking our wood for the winter or dumping wilted vegetables from the kitchen bowl into the 50 gallon drum that Charter made into a compost barrel by blasting air holes in it with his old rifle.

I wonder what questions propose themselves to him these days.

June 9, 1997

Judge Gary Cassevechia
Strafford County Probate Court
County Farm Road
Dover, NH03820

Dear Gary Cassavechia:

I'm writing to thank you for taking the time (did it seem endless? that's the Manny Factor!) to work through the custody/adoption hearing the other day. I understand that you needed to satisfy yourself that Manny understood what he had done and what he was signing away.

I spoke to him at length afterwards, and I, too, am satisfied that he knew what he was doing.

We adopted Manny when he was 14...a product of the "system" in spades (abandoned, almost adopted, given back, put in a group home, put with non-English speaking foster parents, etc. etc.). Although I think my husband, Charter Weeks, and I gave him somewhat of a new lease on his life, I'm also convinced that the damage done to him as a child will never, finally, be totally undone. All I can hope is that he has the basic tools he needs to craft a life for himself.

I'm writing a book about Manny...a small piece of it is enclosed. (I'm sure you'll recognize that I've condensed your part of the incident in the interest of getting the gist.) You wouldn't believe (or perhaps you would) how many anecdotes comprise our lives with this kid! If you're interested, stay tuned.

Thanks again for your patience, your forbearance and your humor. That's so often what it takes!

Sincerely,

Marie Harris

This letter is, of necessity, generic as we are casting a wide net in search of someone who can assist us.

Twelve years ago we adopted a 14 year old hispanic boy whom we had seen on a TV program about hard to adopt children. He is Manny Weeks now 26 years old.

Manny ~~is 25 years old~~ has an IQ of 75. He reads and computes at about the fourth grade level. He is in many respects completely normal. He drives, he works, he is quite a good artist though he only paints flowers, he is gentle and a sweet person.

Our dilemma is that he only does well in ~~a~~ structured situations. He recently completed two years at the job corps and was a model student. He has the highest recommendations from teachers and staff. He thrived at the job corps and he loved it.

Manny does not perceive himself as retarded and is indeed

not retarded enough to be placed in the kinds of programs that are run by the government that typically deal with the profoundly retarded. We do not have the financial resources to place him in some private program even if we could find one which would be appropriate (and we have not found one)

Manny tends to adopt the value system of the situation he is in except that he is entirely unmotivated by money. If he has \$10 he will spend it immediately. If he has \$100 he will spend it in two days. If he has no money he subsists until his pay check comes. He will gladly work but at a pace that most employers find frustrating and he requires regular supervision because he can only be given one task at a time.

~~What Manny does respond to is praise~~

Is the military was not based on the meanness of a



pecking order and if it actually took people with an IQ of 75 for jobs such as custodial work it would be an excellent place for Manny but, that is not the case.

We are seeking some group or institution that would provide Manny with a ~~some~~ structured residential setting ~~in exchange for~~ and a small spending stipend in exchange for work with regular supervision.

It could be a community with people of varying disabilities or a camp for disabled people that needs year round maintenance work or some other situation which is not driven entirely by the profit motive.

We want to emphasize that Manny is quite capable in many respects it is just that he is slow and needs a positive, supportive environment.

At the present time Manny

lives independently in an efficiency apartment deriving about half his support from us and the other half from his employment. If he were thriving that would be entirely acceptable to us but he is not. He mostly hangs out with loser people because ~~with~~ his IQ disability makes him uninteresting to average people. But, like his experience at the job cops, when placed in a situation with high expectations he will rise to them.

If you have any suggestions about a structured environment that would be suitable for this young man we would be extremely grateful

It was a gray, drizzly afternoon and at first I put Manny's low mood down to that, which, in retrospect, was stupid. Though he commented on the weather as sagely as any breakfast regular at Phil's Diner, Manny's take on the world had nothing to do with climate. I asked him about his day and he responded with a quiet, "Fine," instead of his usual "Great."

Rather than retreating to his room as was his habit, he stayed at the table, flipping the pages of The New Yorker.

"So Manny, tell me about your day." I was still only half attending to him.

"That's OK," he replied, in a teenager's version of 'no thanks.' I pushed my notepad aside and looked at him. His shoulders were rounded. He was picking absently at his cuticles with one thumb.

I made a pot of tea and brought him a cup.

"Something bad happened."

"I didn't get in trouble."

"But something happened."

"No. Well, sort of."

"Want to tell me about it?"

"Not really." But he didn't leave. I sensed he might be waiting for me to push him further. Had this been Bill or Sebastian, I'd probably have let it alone, confident that they'd talk it over eventually if they needed to. But with Manny, who found it difficult enough to volunteer even the most innocuous information, I often pressed.

The radio was tuned to WGBH, my afternoon jazz program. I rose and switched the station to WERZ. The music that made me feel as

though I were an unwilling passenger in the backseat of an electric blue Camero did seem to relax Manny's bunched muscles. His fingers stopped picking and began a soft drumming.

"Was it something to do with the kids in school?" I prompted.

"Yeah."

"Your friends?"

"No!"

"Other kids, huh?"

"Yeah. Other kids." His voice sounded hard. "Those other kids."

"Other kids can be mean sometimes."

"I hate mean." He still wasn't looking at me, but I only insisted that he look at me when the two of us were confronting some issue that involved lying or stealing or mouthing off at the soccer coach. I knew somehow that this was a different situation.

What went on in Manny's life when I wasn't there? What lay in between the cheery missives from his teachers, the bulletins Manny constructed in his morning notes and dinner conversations? Which girl did he pine for? What kids in his upstairs classes, beyond the Resource Room, really liked him? Who did he have lunch with?

There was so much I'd never learn from our third son. But I knew him in a strange, visceral way. And I took on his crises as though they were my own, the way I'd always done with Bill, Sebastian and Lenya.

My adult self could never quite shake younger memories of rejection and lost loves, household upheavels, parental storms, abortion, friendships gone mysteriously awry. Empathy brought me close to my children's lives, useless as that may have been in

giving them direction.

Yet the one experience I could not share with my Puerto Rican son was the very matter that concerned him as he lingered over his mug of milky tea, allowing me to quiz him.

"They called me a nigger." Manny spat the sentence into a silence.

It was bound to happen. Rochester was not the most enlightened spot on the globe. On the other hand, there were not the simmering hatreds of a bigger city. Manny had been welcomed into the homes of his white friends, roller skated with an ever-changing roster of white girls, gotten perfectly acceptable haircuts from white barbers, walked freely in any part of town.

But it was bound to happen. His skin color would be turned into an insult just as surely as if he had been fat, or spoke with a lisp, or walked with a limp.

All this I recollected in tranquility. At that moment, though, when Manny said "nigger," I lashed out at those nameless mean kids.

"You're not a nigger, you're a spic!"

Manny's expression was so startled that I began to laugh.

"They're so ignorant they don't even know the difference between an African American and a Puerto Rican!"

Manny managed a weak smile.

"And what do they call Danny when they're being mean?" I asked, referring to his Korean classmate. Manny didn't know, so I tore a clean sheet from my pad and together we made a list of every racial slur we could think of and the kids we knew who might have heard those words flung at them. The list wasn't long, after all this was

New Hampshire, but it served the purpose.

I asked Manny to rip up the paper. He patted me on the shoulder and took his backpack up to his room. Before long I heard him singing to his music.

"You said what?" Charter had laid his briefcase on the table and was putting the beer and milk in the fridge.

"It just came out. I was so pissed."

"Well, that's one way to approach it," he laughed.

"But seriously, I've been trying to figure out how Manny really views himself. Do you think he's unhappy about his color?"

Charter took off his jacket and lit a cigarette. "Hard to say. In a way, he tends to speak of himself in terms of what he can do."

"Yeah, you're right. 'I'm a great skier.' 'I'm a very good painter.'"

"Frankly, considering what he has to overcome, color is the least of his problems. He'll handle it. You know Manny...he doesn't stay upset long. Let's see how things go. He may need a hit of Bill's black-is-beautiful routine."

"Excellent idea. Well, enough." I went into the other room and called up the stairs, "Manny, when you get organized, would you bring down your homework assignments?"

"I will do that, Mom."

After some months with us, Manny had come down to make his breakfast before school and encountered Charter lying on the livingroom floor, trying to ease the pain in his back. Without saying a word, Manny had stepped around him and began taking cereal, bowl and juice glass out of the cupboards. Only when Charter spoke to him, explaining his unusual behavior, did Manny express concern.

What was it that made Manny, usually so sweet and sympathetic, ignore Charter's obvious distress? Later that month, another incident occurred that helped us understand.

One raw Saturday morning he pulled on his work boots, grabbed his heavy plaid jacket, filled the watering can at the sink and went out as usual to feed and water the chickens. Charter and I lingered over our reading, not quite prepared to leave the warmth of the cookstove and begin the day's chores.

Manny returned, knocking dirt from his boots at the door. He too settled back with his copy of Sports Illustrated for Kids and we read companionably in a silence oiled by the music of Beethoven.

Reluctantly, I finished my third cup of tea and dressed for the weather. We needed an armload of wood for the fire.

The short wood was stacked between two trees next to the outhouse and the chicken pen. Before collecting some, I went to let the chickens out into the yard.

The sounds of my days are often only conspicuous in their absence, as when hours of classical music abruptly turn to news. So suddenly the hens' perpetual murmurings, the obligato that always accompanied my weeding and raking and planting was strangely absent. I opened the little door to their house. The chickens were strewn

about the floor like fat feather dusters.

I left the door swinging on its hinges, took three pieces of split oak off the pile and came back indoors.

"Manny," I said in a neutral voice that caused Charter to look up, "did you feed the chickens?"

"Yes. And I filled their water pan too."

"And did you notice anything?" Charter put down his newspaper, curious as to what I was getting at.

Manny put his hand to his forehead. He was thinking.

"Anything, uh, unusual?" I prompted.

More thinking. "Yes."

"What did you notice?" I struggled to stay calm.

He flinched as he answered, as though to duck a blow or an angry accusation.

"They had no heads."

We took Manny to my parents' house--a generous and drafty remodeled barn in Vermont--for Christmas. In a family so large that my youngest sister only outranks my oldest son by two years, there has always been room for more: adolescent friends at odds with their own families, visiting cousins, new children. I remember dinners at the long table in our old house when Dad would suddenly point at me or Peg or Tom and demand--for the benefit of one of our startled schoolmates--"Do I know you?" As he got older and we all continued to use his home as a halfway house, Dad grew weary of the parade. Not surprisingly, he began to resent anyone who intruded on his time with Mom. Nonetheless, he continued to attend to the ones whom he sensed were special.

Much as I detested the season's shopping frenzy, I loved the family chaos of Christmas in Vermont, especially that December when fifteen-year-old Manny was welcomed without question, without hesitation. He and Dad connected over the complications of working the black box that controlled the satellite dish. And Mom added his birthday, favorite foods, taste in clothes to the domestic master list as he became the newest member of the clan.

The morning after Christmas the place was littered with gift detritus and grandchildren's outerwear. Sisters and brothers crowded the kitchen table eating breakfast and making pots of tea while Mom tidied and jotted shopping lists for the next meal. Dad had taken to his room with his pipe and a paperback. Outside the living room window, Mt. Equinox was a purple-black shrug against a cold blue winter sky.

Manny was sitting quietly by the fireplace, thumbing a National

Geographic, his presents in a neat pile beside him. "Want to learn how to ski?" Charter suddenly asked him, folding a section of the Sunday Times. "Marie, how about it? Want to come?" Neither Charter nor I skied very well or very often, but the prospect of spending a beautiful winter day on Bromley Mountain appealed to me. And it clearly interested Manny who located his new down jacket and wool cap, borrowed a pair of ski gloves from his uncle David and, with uncharacteristic alacrity, presented himself at the door.

While Charter dealt with the ski school, I took Manny to rent skis. Even at that early hour the room was crowded. Women in sleek outfits towed pink and purple pre-schoolers, fat as outlet shopping bags, to the first area where business-like teens barked, "Shoe size? Take this form. Next!" as they pulled boots from numbered slots and banged them on the wood counter. Benches were filling with people. The snap of buckles alternated with the distinctive two-step clunk of shod parents as they negotiated the lines with their children. A swinging door brought gusts of snowy air into the damp wool atmosphere of the rental room.

Manny sat hunched over, staring at the black and green plastic boots on his feet. I bent and fastened the clasps, thinking about the old days of laces and icy fingers.

"Stand up, hon. How do they feel?"

Manny stood, still looking at his feet as if waiting for new information.

"Are they comfortable?"

He took two steps forward, heel and toe, heel and toe. "I don't know."

Like a shoe clerk, I reached down to press the place where his big toe should have been, but the shiny boot that held his foot was as hard as a typewriter case. "Manny, does your foot feel OK? Is it cramped or anything?"

"I guess not."

"Manny, please." I tried to keep the irritation out of my voice. "You're the only one who can tell if these boots fit. You can get a bigger size if you need to."

He walked a few steps further. His forehead was furrowed in concentration. "Manny!" Patience, I said to myself as he looked back at me, his brown eyes wide with confusion.

"How do you tell?" I asked the man beside us, but he was struggling with his squirming, red-faced son and didn't hear. If this were a little kid, I fumed inwardly, I'd understand.

"It's OK, Mom." Manny patted my head the way he always did when he sensed I was upset.

I gave up. 12 was Manny's shoe size; 12 would be his ski boot. We moved on to the ski-fitting area where another bright-eyed ski bum quizzed Manny on his weight and level of proficiency. "140. Beginner," I answered for him. She handed him a pair of scuffed skis, shoved a pole into his armpit and measured to his wrist. "Have a great day!" she chirped and dismissed us. We threaded our way into the bright outdoors where Charter was standing next to a blue pennant marked 'B'. A young woman in a one-piece blue jumpsuit was gathering her morning's brood of stumbling students, directing them to the lift.

"This is your group, Manny. We'll meet you here at noon. Do you

have your watch? Both hands on the twelve."

"I know that, Mom," Manny answered quietly, and I was immediately sorry I'd said it. Sometimes it was hard for me to switch gears between Manny the child and Manny the young man.

We watched them go: the lithe instructor; the small man all in black, struggling to stay upright; three children crossing and uncrossing their short skis, starting forward; the woman with a huge white fur hat and a day glo parka who laughed and waved her pole at some people taking her picture; and Manny, testing his legs like a skater on fresh ice, moving on the snow, awkward, tentative. We followed their progress across the icy spots near the lodge to the chair lift. The last we saw of Manny, he was standing alongside the man in black, in the way of a swinging chair that careened like a ferris wheel ride, then, caught at the knees, he was seated and lofted, poles and skis at all angles, off the ground and up into the clean air, above the slope, above zig zagging forms racing toward the bottom.

By the time Charter and I got back to the ski rental room, we had the place to ourselves. Outfitted, we went to the ticket window, bought an afternoon pass, then retired to the deck of the lodge with our coffee and tea and the rest of the Times. Occasionally I'd glance up at the hill. The beginner slope was wide and gentle. A morning of sun had softened the surface and the V's of snowplow turns made elegant patterns between the stands of pine. It was easy to spot the ski classes descending in looping lines behind the instructors. I didn't catch sight of Manny's group.

"Marie, look!" Charter was standing at the railing, holding his

hand to his eyes. "Is that Manny?"

Weaving among the multicolored heaps of the fallen, skis in parallel, body bent into the fall line, a slim shape was nearing the bottom. He ended his run at the blue pennant, in a spray of snow, stopping like a skater.

"Could that possibly be Manny?"

The instructor was beaming when we arrived. She draped an arm over Manny's shoulder. "I took his poles away. They're lethal weapons in his hands," she laughed. "Otherwise, he's doing great. I don't think he needs an afternoon lesson. Just let him practice. This boy's a natural!"

"I can ski," Manny announced in a voice that said he wasn't surprised.

I turned to the instructor. "He's trying out for the Puerto Rican ski team, right Manny?"

Manny smiled and looked down. "Right, Mom." And then, "I think I'll be needing a pair of goggles."

* * * * *

Dear Garnmom and Garnpol:

Thant for the coious and shous: and have me come to your house.

Thans for breing me to the moeves and thans for shoes me ho to teren the T.V. on to a cheanow. I hop you will have a neivs teripe on the planey.

Love your Gran Sun

Manny C. Weeks

A week earlier, I'd picked Bill up at Logan airport and on the ride back told him about my kid-anxiety. I'm not sure why I involved Bill in this matter except we'd developed the habit of talking to each other about whatever was on our minds.

Silas and the Weeks genetic line aside, Charter had more than once broached the subject of children. He thought he'd like to have a child of his own. The topic, I explained to Bill, was guaranteed to bring me to tears no matter how I promised myself to be sympathetic. I was deeply in love for the first time in my life and this life seemed overflowing with possibilities. The merest suggestion of admitting a new child into my Eden was enough to depress me for days. I had no idea how to solve what was the only problem between us.

We pulled into the driveway, unloaded the duffles, Bill entered vacation mode, and we continued with our daily lives.

"Go to bed, Mom." I overheard the beginning of their conversation, and fell asleep under a moon shining through the skylight. I learned the rest in the days after Bill left.

"It was a four handkerchief night," was how Charter described it. "Bill started off by telling me that you simply couldn't deal with any more kids. You needed to write, to be your own person. He said that having a kid would ruin our marriage."

Bill told Charter what he knew about his mother. And then Bill--wired, intense, sure in the way young men are utterly sure--said to the man who had taught him and his brother wood and water, anarchy and personal responsibility, the pleasures and

dangers of drugs, the importance of laughter, the ways of Zen and how to change a tire: "Besides, you already have two sons."

You already have two sons. Those words were my reprieve. Charter was content, believing that the two boys who had entered his life through me would stay with him, with or without me.

The days were drifting toward fall. Bill left for Italy. Sebastian returned to Pitzer College with Nicola, the bright, shy young redhead whom he'd brought to our home for the summer. I missed them all, especially Nicola. She had been my companion for the season, a welcome female presence in the house. She gradually overcame her unease about dark woods and insects (though ravenous mosquitoes seemed to single her out for particularly vicious attacks). She found a job in Portsmouth and, while Sebastian was away at an international camp in Senegal, Nicola began writing poems and came with me to the Monday workshops at Skimmilk Farm.

When they all left, hauling bags held together with duct tape, Charter and I settled into the familiar, simpler routines. Our advertising business was thriving; the garden had yielded a freezer's worth of vegetables; and the afternoons were still warm enough to invite long soaks in the Isinglass River. We could walk through the forest to the secluded spot with a patch of sand and a swimming hole where we'd shed our clothes and wade out to flat, half-submerged rocks to sip gin and tonic out of a mayonnaise jar.

The tension that I'd carried over the issue of another child was slipping from me as easily as tea-colored water over pebbles.

So why, a month later, when I turned on the national news

fifteen minutes early and saw Manuel Cabrera speaking to a Boston-area audience, I said to Charter, "Look at this!" I'll never know.

Manny, fresh from a videotaped Charles River sail with WBZ-TV's Jack Williams; Manny, Wednesday's Child; Manny, a fourteen year old Puerto Rican orphan from Springfield, Massachusetts chosen as the segment's star--lost kid of the week--announced, straight-backed and sincere, to the viewing public on that late summer evening: "I have never had a family, and I would like one...you know: a man and a woman."

Charter left off doing the dishes. I stopped in the middle of the room. "Imagine. A man and a woman. Funny, we're that."

There was an 800 number on the screen. I called but before dessert, Ellen had made it clear that I was expected to produce a son. As he lectured me on my familial obligations, I stared at the half-eaten sandwich, uncharacteristically silent. He kept talking about the Weeks family name and the Weeks family heirloom and the Weeks family expectations until, finally, at a respite, he began to respond to this article. I pushed my chair back and left the restaurant. All the way home I rehearsed the words I should have said, the things I'd say when I saw him again, the angry letter I'd write.

"He wants me to have a son," I said. "He told me how you wouldn't have a son and he wants a grandson now."

"What's baby?" Charter interrupted.

"I don't know," I said. "He said I should have a son and he wants a grandson now."

Carol called us that fall evening in obvious distress. Could she come over and talk to Charter and me?

Carol was Charter's first wife and now a neighbor. Though we had friends and family in common, we saw her infrequently--at community gatherings, the grocery store--so this urgency surprised me.

"I don't know how to tell you. I don't know where to begin." She pulled her baggy sweater tightly around her long cotton dress. Charter poured her a glass of red wine. "I had lunch with Silas today."

Charter's father usually only invited people to lunch when he had something serious to discuss. His will. His ex-wife. The daughter who always disappointed him. I had been his guest at such a meal soon after Charter and I married. After the salad but before dessert, Silas had made it clear that I was expected to produce a son. As he lectured me on my familial obligation, I stared at my half-eaten sandwich, uncharacteristically silent. He kept talking about the Weeks family name and the Weeks family heirlooms and the Weeks family expectations until finally, at a complete loss as to how to respond to this outrage, I pushed my chair back and left the restaurant. All the way home I rehearsed the words I should have said, the things I'd say when I saw him again, the angry letter I'd write.

"He wants me to have a baby!" Carol blurted. "He told me how you wouldn't and how he needs a grandson and..."

"Whose baby?" Charter interrupted.

"I don't know." Now Carol was crying. I reached for her hand over the table, concern for her immediate pain and confusion

outweighing my own shock. "At first he seemed to be suggesting that I get pregnant by Charter. Then I got the feeling that he'd do it himself."

"That son of a bitch!" Charter banged his hand on the table, spilling beer on the rug.

"And then he said I could always go to a sperm bank--Harvard or somewhere--and he'd give me money to raise it. Supposing," she giggled through a sob, "supposing I had a girl!"

I don't remember much about the rest of that night. Charter called his father and said the next time he'd talk to him would be through a psychiatrist. Carol calmed down and walked home. Charter and I drove up Oak Hill to Guy's house. Charter needed his surrogate father to put this bizarre event into perspective.

The fair comes to Rochester in late September while the days are still warm and the last of summer's breezes tease the night air. The fairgrounds sprawl over 100 acres in the midst of a shabby neighborhood near the neglected buildings on Main Street. What was once a thriving shoe factory town with its own opera house is now a city struggling to survive the devastating economic upheavals that began in the late sixties. Yet some traditions persist, and the fair is one of them.

The Rochester Fair isn't as old timey as the ones in Deerfield and Sandwich, but I love it for its particular mixture of farm exhibits and honkey tonk. For two weeks people throng the long gray exhibit sheds, the rides, the food stands and games of chance, the harness racing track.

"I was thinking," Manny began, as he finished his after school yogurt and juice, "about the Rochester Fair." Manny usually edged cautiously into any subject that involved permission or money.

"Josh and them are probably going tonight."

"Oh?" I looked up from my papers. "That's nice. Josh and who?"

"And David. And some kids from school will be there." Manny had rinsed his glass at the sink and was looking out the kitchen window, his back to me. "I was thinking about going."

"Do you have any homework?"

"I finished it in Resource Room."

"Do you have any money?"

"In my bank book I do."

"Well, I think that would be OK as long as you're not out too late. Why don't you ride your bike uptown and take \$10 out of your

savings."

"I will do that, Mom." Though most of Manny's summer money was earmarked for his ski weekends, I didn't see any harm in his using some of it for the fair.

He called Josh. He put the green passbook and a yellow withdrawal slip into his back pocket and patted my head on his way to the door. "See you shortly," he said, just the way, I realized with a start of pleasure, Charter always did when he left the house.

Josh and David arrived as Charter and I were eating dinner. Manny came downstairs wearing his black parachute pants, a short sleeved red shirt and a bandana tied around his head.

"Hey, Man."

"OK, guys," said Charter. "Have fun. Be home by ten." He pulled out a five dollar bill and handed it to Manny. "Have one of those sausage and pepper subs for me."

"Thanks, Chart."

Usually we found time to visit the fair ourselves, if only so Charter could add to his photographic record of New Hampshire at play. He has collected wonderful shots of the tattooed bikers who yearly congregate at Weirs Beach; and the small tent circus that comes every August to a meadow near Dover's County Home; the pit crews at the Lee Speedway; horse pulls at the Barrington ballfield.

By day the Rochester Fair offered up cages of prize roosters and ducks, 4-H-ers napping on hay bales beside their lambs or heifers. Groomed sheep nudging each other in pens, Heavy-uddered cows standing stuck in stalls; from a loudspeaker mounted on a painted trailer, a voice announcing the next running of Robinson's Racing

Pigs.

We'd wander a labyrinth of aisles and booths in the exhibit buildings, dutifully admiring all manner of handicraft and garden bounty. There were quilts and pumpkins, pickles and jams, oil paintings of covered bridges and seascapes done in water color. There were bunches of perfect beets, mounds of squash and gourds in antic shapes, heavy hooked rugs, woodwork, metalwork, maple syrup, glistening combs of honey and shelves of baked goods. Blue and red and yellow and white rosettes decorated the biggest, the sweetest, the prettiest, the best.

"Our zucchinis look this good," I'd say to Charter. And, "We grew terrific broccolis this year. We could have entered them. Your bread and butter pickles would have won first prize." It was a game. We'd cruise the show as if we had been competitors, weighing our melons, judging our bright simmered jams.

Evening at the fair was for holding hands under the winking lights of the ferris wheel, the spinning silver bullets and tumbling wire baskets filled with shrieking adolescents. I could relive from the safe ground the terror that used to propel me on wild rides into cockeyed sky without ever again having to prove my courage to a boyfriend or allow myself to be cajoled by children onto machines called The Octopus or The Hurricane.

Charter and I would walk together, amidst teenaged lovers and couples pushing baby vehicles, through the fractured carnival music and soft smells of pizza and donuts and green peppers, to the racetrack where we'd put two dollars to win on a trotting horse with a great name and watch it nose out the fourth place finisher. Every

year, as we left the fairgrounds, the same blind man was playing his accordian at the gate.

Manny came home on time that Tuesday. He showed us the baseball cap he'd won on the ring toss, and the two miniature Snoopy dolls from the roulette game.

The following afternoon, after Manny'd filled in his grammar sheets and I'd checked his math, he asked again if he could go to the fair. And again he rode to the bank. He was excited when he came home that night.

"Look what I won this time!" He had a large bright pink bear under one arm and a framed poster of a white Corvette under the other.

"I'm giving this to Ben. Babies like stuffed animals. And this," he presented me with the poster, "is for you. Cause you and Chart drive Corvettes."

"Wow, Manny. How did you win these?"

He couldn't remember if it was the dart board with the balloons or the rifles and the ducks. "Maybe it was the basketball game."

"And did you go on any rides?" asked Charter. "Did you eat fried dough?" Manny was vague on the details.

"I had a real fun time. Can I go tomorrow?"

"I think that's enough for this week," Charter answered. "You can go on Saturday for the last day."

By the end of the weekend, Manny had bestowed another garish bear and both Snoopys on Ben, given Wim and Jonell a Rochester Fair mug, and had motorcycle posters for himself and Nick.

When Joyce came by on Sunday to deliver a dozen eggs, she was

laughing. "You should have seen Manny's face when he gave those animals to Ben. He looked so proud of himself!"

On Monday I went up to Manny's room to collect enough dirty clothes to finish off a load of wash. His bank book was lying on the drawing table. I glanced through the pages.

"Oh my God. Charter!" The little gray numbers followed each other in a neat column down the page. \$10. \$60. \$25. \$90. In total, almost \$400 had been withdrawn over the course of five days. Manny had all but cleaned out his entire summer's savings.

"But how?" Charter kept adding the figures. "It's not possible, is it?"

I dreaded the process of finding out the answer to that question almost more than the answer itself. The two of us waiting in our chairs at the table. Manny coming through the door, bookbag slung over his shoulder, happy face.

"Hi Mom and Dad. How was your day?"

Manny, sit down. Manny, here's your bank book. What's your explanation?

Manny. Collapsed in the chair, head down, shoulders bowed under the parental onslaught. Manny on trial.

Having admitted to taking those sums from his savings, he could not, no matter how many times we asked, account for the money.

His patience was, as usual, far greater than mine. My voice grew louder, my words harsher. I sat back in the chair. "Manny," I said quietly. "I want you to go up to your room for fifteen minutes. I want you to think very hard about where all that money went. Then I want you to come downstairs and tell us the truth."

He came down. We asked him again. Chin still on his chest, he said in a whisper, "I bought marijuana."

Well that, I said to myself, makes more sense. "From whom, Manny?"

"From Josh and Dave."

My anger returned. I reached for the phone and called both boys, telling each to get his tail to our house.

"Tell them, Manny," Charter said when the boys arrived. And Manny repeated what he said to us.

"Absolutely not true! Manny, look at me!" Josh was stunned.

"Manny, have Dave or I ever sold you dope?"

Manny didn't answer or look at his friends.

"Manny." Dave asked the question again.

"No." Manny's voice was tiny.

"What?"

"No!" And he began to cry.

That night, after the furor had died down and Manny was in bed, we tried to piece together a version of the events. Working with a calculator, we listed the possibilities. Food. And food for friends. Rides and rides for friends. Twenty dollar bills handed to hot dog vendors, the change stuffed away uncounted. And games. Hours of games.

"I guess he really could have dropped \$400," Charter concluded wearily. "And he must have felt like a king."

Though Manny had served as a kind of older brother to Nick Cappiello, tossing endless footballs and baseballs with him, watching mind-numbing hours of Saturday afternoon sports, riding bikes and fishing off the dock, it was Ben's birth in 1986 that sparked Manny's closer relationship with the Cappiello family.

Dan and Joyce's small house was hand built by one of the Community's first members in the lee of a huge rock outcropping. It was comfortable for the two of them as Dan set up his law practice and Joyce finished her schooling to become a nurse practitioner. When Nicolas was born, he occupied the spare room. Then Lena displaced him. Dan and Joyce built a new bedroom for themselves and the kids grew into the spaces they left.

Ben's arrival added one more layer of shirts, socks, toys, books and wheeled conveyances to a home that Nick and Lena had already littered with baseball gloves, violins, sneakers, rubber rafts, Barbie dolls, board games, battery-operated robots, coloring books, nerf balls, posters, stuffed animals, snow boots, sleds, training wheels and mittens.

It always seemed to me, when Joyce would clear a space for our mugs of tea among the newspapers, envelopes and math worksheets on the diningroom table, that every item belonging to the family was, at any given moment, lost.

Joyce and I began our relationship soon after I came to live in the Community. It had been one of the original decisions of the founders of Scruton Pond Farm that no dwelling would be built in sight of another. As a result, while we were all within walking distance by dirt roads or paths through the woods, our immediate

surroundings offered the illusion of sylvan isolation. But when it was necessary to borrow enough potatoes to complete a recipe or when we needed an extra body to help move a freezer or fell a tree, our neighbors were nearby and, in an unspoken covenant, always willing to help.

Our proximity also encouraged informal comings together. For instance, Joyce's diningroom, table pushed back and rug rolled up, made a convenient studio for Jennifer's twice-weekly dance class. In the familiar manner of women gathered around a task, our class afforded exercise for both body and spirit. While we danced and sweated-- Jennifer, Cherry, Donna, Ann and I--we talked about our quotidian lives. We grew to know one another.

Joyce never actually admitted that the appearance of a third child presented an insurmountable problem; she was possessed of a serene temperament that bordered on fatalistic. Still it was clear that, between her husband's rigid schedule and the demands of her own work, she needed help.

Enter Manny Weeks.

What had he already learned?

That an outhouse needs a shovel of wood ash now and then. That the kitchen stove will smoke if the flue isn't open. That adjectives go with nouns and the phone must be answered 'Isinglass Studio' between the hours of 9 and 5. He could split maple and oak. He knew how to do a laundry and hang it out. How to make French fries. He could accompany us to an art opening and voice his opinion about what was hanging on the walls. He had stopped saying 'ain't' and he used words like 'appropriate' in ordinary sentences. He could tell

time, multiply two digit figures, make a luminous watercolor from a pot of cut lilies on the table, tell the difference between a Van Gogh and a Monet, separate the garbage into glass and cans, paper and compost.

Then Joyce introduced Manny to a world I never wanted to experience again: infancy. She needed him and he loved to be needed. She taught him to change a diaper, warm a bottle, dress him or get him ready for bed. Ben adored him.

You could see it. I'd drop over on a Sunday to borrow the Globe TV section. Dan was usually reclining in front of a Red Sox game. Lena might be working on a macaroni collage. Nick, restless, would be waiting for Manny to pitch on the lawn. And Ben, still in his one-piece pajama, would be poised at the head of the stairs, ready to fling his little trusting body into the open arms of

"Maaaaaannnnneee!"

At first, if Dan and Joyce wanted Manny for a Saturday night, Charter and I stayed home. If we had plans, Jonell would stop in. What if there were a kitchen fire? What if Nick and Lena started a fight that Manny couldn't handle? Supposing Ben began to choke? The Cappiello decision to make Manny Weeks their babysitter involved the neighborhood.

But gradually it became evident that the arrangement was working. There were no crises. Manny was able to manage his position as Ben's nanny while maintaining his fraternal relationship with Nick.

He made himself at home at the Cappiello's, becoming as familiar with their domestic routines as he was with ours. He often chided

the older kids about the state of their rooms, washed up a sinkfull of dishes unasked or helped with the chickens.

Dan and Joyce accommodated those moments when Manny's notion of family extended beyond their own.

"I had to ask him," Joyce told me one morning, "not to leave notes for us on letters we've put out to mail. But, "she responded to my worried question about Manny's wandering into their empty house, "it's OK that he feels free to come in. That's fine." Her patience was boundless. "Dan does get a little ruffled periodically."

"What do you mean?"

She laughed. "It's nothing, really. Now and then Manny pops up unexpectedly. For instance, the other morning Dan came out of the bathroom to discover Manny in his bedroom."

On balance, it all must have been worth it.

Sometime during that period I accepted an invitation to judge a literary competition in Pennsylvania. One of my fellow judges was a black poet from the Midwest. We had dinner together and exchanged stories. I told her all about Manny and I must have said something about his child care skills.

Suddenly she became serious, almost angry. "Never," she said, in a quiet voice that chilled me, "allow your son to take a job dealing with young children. Remember, "she leaned toward me, "the outside sees him first as a young man with a disability. If any issue should come up about abuse, any accusation at all, he'd be defenseless."

The pleasure drained from my evening. I thought about Manny reading Ben his bedtime story, his index finger moving carefully

over the printed words. The time would come when Ben would be able to read on his own, and inevitably the time when he would read much better than Manny. Goodnight. Moon.

has always been room for more: adolescent friends at odds with their own families, visiting cousins, new children. I remember dinners at the long table in our old house when Dad would suddenly point at me or Peg or Sam and demand that I tell him what I thought of the school. "Do I know you?" he would say. "You look like you belong to us here." He was a half-way decent, but grew weary of the parade. Not surprisingly, he began to resent anyone who intruded on his time with Mom. Nonetheless, he continued to attend to the ones whom he deemed were special.

Much as I detested the incessant shopping frenzy, I loved the family chaos of Christmas in Vermont, especially that December when fifteen-year-old Manny was welcomed without question, without hesitation. He and Dad conspired over the complications of working the black box that controlled the satellite dish. And Mom added his birthday, favorite food, taste in clothes to the domestic master list as he became the newest member of the clan.

The morning after Christmas the place was littered with gift detritus and grandchildren's leftovers. Sisters and brothers crowded the kitchen table eating breakfast and talking about the night's events. Manny had taken to his room with his pipe and a paperback. Outside the living room window, Mt. Equinox was a purple-black string against a cold blue winter sky.

Manny was sitting quietly by the fireplace, thumbing a National

We took Manny to my parents' house--a generous and drafty remodeled barn in Vermont--for Christmas. In a family so large that my youngest sister only outranks my oldest son by two years, there has always been room for more: adolescent friends at odds with their own families, visiting cousins, new children. I remember dinners at the long table in our old house when Dad would suddenly point at me or Peg or Tom and demand--for the benefit of one of our startled schoolmates--"Do I know you?" As he got older and we all continued to use his home as a halfway house, Dad grew weary of the parade. Not surprisingly, he began to resent anyone who intruded on his time with Mom. Nonetheless, he continued to attend to the ones whom he sensed were special.

Much as I detested the season's shopping frenzy, I loved the family chaos of Christmas in Vermont, especially that December when fifteen-year-old Manny was welcomed without question, without hesitation. He and Dad connected over the complications of working the black box that controlled the satellite dish. And Mom added his birthday, favorite foods, taste in clothes to the domestic master list as he became the newest member of the clan.

The morning after Christmas the place was littered with gift detritus and grandchildren's outerwear. Sisters and brothers crowded the kitchen table eating breakfast and making pots of tea while Mom tidied and jotted shopping lists for the next meal. Dad had taken to his room with his pipe and a paperback. Outside the living room window, Mt. Equinox was a purple-black shrug against a cold blue winter sky.

Manny was sitting quietly by the fireplace, thumbing a National

Geographic, his presents in a neat pile beside him. "Want to learn how to ski?" Charter suddenly asked him, folding a section of the Sunday Times. "Marie, how about it? Want to come?" Neither Charter nor I skied very well or very often, but the prospect of spending a beautiful winter day on Bromley Mountain appealed to me. And it clearly interested Manny who located his new down jacket and wool cap, borrowed a pair of ski gloves from his uncle David and, with uncharacteristic alacrity, presented himself at the door.

While Charter dealt with the ski school, I took Manny to rent skis. Even at that early hour the room was crowded. Women in sleek outfits towed pink and purple pre-schoolers, fat as outlet shopping bags, to the first area where business-like teens barked, "Shoe size? Take this form. Next!" as they pulled boots from numbered slots and banged them on the wood counter. Benches were filling with people. The snap of buckles alternated with the distinctive two-step clunk of shod parents as they negotiated the lines with their children. A swinging door brought gusts of snowy air into the damp wool atmosphere of the rental room.

Manny sat hunched over, staring at the black and green plastic boots on his feet. I bent and fastened the clasps, thinking about the old days of laces and icy fingers.

"Stand up, hon. How do they feel?"

Manny stood, still looking at his feet as if waiting for new information.

"Are they comfortable?"

He took two steps forward, heel and toe, heel and toe. "I don't know."

Like a shoe clerk, I reached down to press the place where his big toe should have been, but the shiny boot that held his foot was as hard as a typewriter case. "Manny, does your foot feel OK? Is it cramped or anything?"

"I guess not."

"Manny, please." I tried to keep the irritation out of my voice. "You're the only one who can tell if these boots fit. You can get a bigger size if you need to."

He walked a few steps further. His forehead was furrowed in concentration. "Manny!" Patience, I said to myself as he looked back at me, his brown eyes wide with confusion.

"How do you tell?" I asked the man beside us, but he was struggling with his squirming, red-faced son and didn't hear. If this were a little kid, I fumed inwardly, I'd understand.

"It's OK, Mom." Manny patted my head the way he always did when he sensed I was upset.

I gave up. 12 was Manny's shoe size; 12 would be his ski boot. We moved on to the ski-fitting area where another bright-eyed ski bum quizzed Manny on his weight and level of proficiency. "140. Beginner," I answered for him. She handed him a pair of scuffed skis, shoved a pole into his armpit and measured to his wrist. "Have a great day!" she chirped and dismissed us. We threaded our way into the bright outdoors where Charter was standing next to a blue pennant marked 'B'. A young woman in a one-piece blue jumpsuit was gathering her morning's brood of stumbling students, directing them to the lift.

"This is your group, Manny. We'll meet you here at noon. Do you

have your watch? Both hands on the twelve."

"I know that, Mom," Manny answered quietly, and I was immediately sorry I'd said it. Sometimes it was hard for me to switch gears between Manny the child and Manny the young man.

We watched them go: the lithe instructor; the small man all in black, struggling to stay upright; three children crossing and uncrossing their short skis, starting forward; the woman with a huge white fur hat and a day glo parka who laughed and waved her pole at some people taking her picture; and Manny, testing his legs like a skater on fresh ice, moving on the snow, awkward, tentative. We followed their progress across the icy spots near the lodge to the chair lift. The last we saw of Manny, he was standing alongside the man in black, in the way of a swinging chair that careened like a ferris wheel ride, then, caught at the knees, he was seated and lofted, poles and skis at all angles, off the ground and up into the clean air, above the slope, above zig zagging forms racing toward the bottom.

By the time Charter and I got back to the ski rental room, we had the place to ourselves. Outfitted, we went to the ticket window, bought an afternoon pass, then retired to the deck of the lodge with our coffee and tea and the rest of the Times. Occasionally I'd glance up at the hill. The beginner slope was wide and gentle. A morning of sun had softened the surface and the V's of snowplow turns made elegant patterns between the stands of pine. It was easy to spot the ski classes descending in looping lines behind the instructors. I didn't catch sight of Manny's group.

"Marie, look!" Charter was standing at the railing, holding his

hand to his eyes. "Is that Manny?"

Weaving among the multicolored heaps of the fallen, skis in parallel, body bent into the fall line, a slim shape was nearing the bottom. He ended his run at the blue pennant, in a spray of snow, stopping like a skater.

"Could that possibly be Manny?"

The instructor was beaming when we arrived. She draped an arm over Manny's shoulder. "I took his poles away. They're lethal weapons in his hands," she laughed. "Otherwise, he's doing great. I don't think he needs an afternoon lesson. Just let him practice. This boy's a natural!"

"I can ski," Manny announced in a voice that said he wasn't surprised.

I turned to the instructor. "He's trying out for the Puerto Rican ski team, right Manny?"

Manny smiled and looked down. "Right, Mom." And then, "I think I'll be needing a pair of goggles."

* * * * *

Dear Garnmom and Garnpol:

Thant for the coious and shous: and have me come to your house.

Thans for breing me to the moeves and thans for shoes me ho to teren the T.V. on to a cheanow. I hop you will have a neivs teripe on the planey.

Love your Gran Sun

Manny C. Weeks

(Thanks for the clothes and the shoes and for having me come to your house. And thanks for bringing me to the movies and for showing me how to turn the TV on to a channel. I hope you will have a nice trip on the plane...)

as deeply in love for the first time in my life and this life seemed overflowing with possibilities. The mere suggestion of admitting a new child into my life was enough to depress me for days. I had no idea how to solve what was the only problem between us.

We pulled into the driveway, unlocked the coffee, Bill entered vacation mode, and we continued with our daily lives.

"Go to bed, Mom." I overheard the beginning of their conversation, and fell asleep under a moon shining through the skylight. I learned the rest in the days after Bill left. "It was a four-hour night," was how Charlie described it. "Bill started off by telling me that you couldn't sleep with any more kids. You mean to write, to be your own person. He said that having a kid would ruin our marriage."

Bill told Charlie that he knew about his mother and then Bill's mind went to those words and how they would ruin his life. Intense, sure as the day young men are utterly sure of their minds and how they will ruin their lives. The water, searchy and personal responsibility, the pleasure of danger, the danger of drugs, the importance of laughter, the ways of the world, how to change a tire: "See how you already have two sons."

You already have two sons. Those words were a reprieve. Charlie was content, believing that the two boys who had entered his life

Silas and the Weeks genetic line aside, Charter had more than once broached the subject of children. He thought he'd like to have a child of his own. The topic, I explained to Bill, was guaranteed to bring me to tears no matter how I promised myself to be sympathetic. I was deeply in love for the first time in my life and this life seemed overflowing with possibilities. The merest suggestion of admitting a new child into my Eden was enough to depress me for days. I had no idea how to solve what was the only problem between us.

We pulled into the driveway, unloaded the duffles, Bill entered vacation mode, and we continued with our daily lives.

"Go to bed, Mom." I overheard the beginning of their conversation, and fell asleep under a moon shining through the skylight. I learned the rest in the days after Bill left.

"It was a four handkerchief night," was how Charter described it. "Bill started off by telling me that you simply couldn't deal with any more kids. You needed to write, to be your own person. He said that having a kid would ruin our marriage."

Bill told Charter what he knew about his mother. And then Bill--wired, intense, sure in the way young men are utterly sure--said to the man who had taught him and his brother wood and water, anarchy and personal responsibility, the pleasures and dangers of drugs, the importance of laughter, the ways of Zen and how to change a tire: "Besides, you already have two sons."

You already have two sons. Those words were my reprieve. Charter was content, believing that the two boys who had entered his life

through me would stay with him, with or without me.

The days were drifting toward fall. Bill left for Italy. Sebastian returned to Pitzer College with Nicola, the bright, shy young redhead whom he'd brought to our home for the summer. I missed them all, especially Nicola. She had been my companion for the season, a welcome female presence in the house. She gradually overcame her unease about dark woods and insects (though ravenous mosquitoes seemed to single her out for particularly vicious attacks). She found a job in Portsmouth and, while Sebastian was away at an international camp in Senegal, Nicola began writing poems and came with me to the Monday workshops at Skimmilk Farm.

When they all left, hauling bags held together with duct tape, Charter and I settled into the familiar, simpler routines. Our advertising business was thriving; the garden had yielded a freezer's worth of vegetables; and the afternoons were still warm enough to invite long soaks in the Isinglass River. We could walk through the forest to the secluded spot with a patch of sand and a swimming hole where we'd shed our clothes and wade out to flat, half-submerged rocks to sip gin and tonic out of a mayonnaise jar.

The tension that I'd carried over the issue of another child was slipping from me as easily as tea-colored water over pebbles.

So why, a month later, when I turned on the national news fifteen minutes early and saw Manuel Cabrera speaking to a Boston-area audience, I said to Charter, "Look at this!" I'll never know.

Manny, fresh from a videotaped Charles River sail with WBZ-TV's

Jack Williams; Manny, Wednesday's Child; Manny, a fourteen year old Puerto Rican orphan from Springfield, Massachusetts chosen as the segment's star--lost kid of the week--announced, straight-backed and sincere, to the viewing public on that late summer evening: "I have never had a family, and I would like one...you know: a man and a woman."

Charter left off doing the dishes. I stopped in the middle of the room. "Imagine. A man and a woman. Funny, we're that."

There was an 800 number on the screen.

SECTION FROM CHAPTER OF THE DAY, MANNY

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We agreed to meet Maria at a restaurant off the highway on a mid-morning in early September, 1984. Driving the three hours of interstate from New Hampshire into Massachusetts, past the old mill towns of Lawrence and Lowell toward Springfield, Charter and I amused ourselves by finding new stations on the radio. We didn't talk much.

Maria had returned our call immediately. She'd sounded enthusiastic. She arranged the interview without telling us much more about Manny than what we'd heard on TV. We weren't at all sure that what we were doing made sense, but, we reasoned, it couldn't hurt to investigate the matter further.

"I'm Maria Edwards, Manny's social worker." She was a small, trim woman with short black hair. She spoke quickly, the edges of her English softened by the cadences of Spanish. She smiled often.

We shook hands and went into the restaurant, exchanging the comfortable pleasantries that strangers who are about to do business need. Charter and Maria ordered coffee. My tea arrived as three separate entities: empty cup, tea bag and carafe of tepid, coffee-flavored water. We waited in the darkened, empty room as Maria spread sheaves of paper on the thick tablecloth but did not refer to them.

"Manny is a wonderful boy. I've known him for three years. Let me tell you what I've found out about his life."

The story of any boy's fourteen years ought to tumble and trip over baseball gloves and birthday parties, dogs and cousins, hand-me-down bicycles, stuffed animals, best friends, crayoned drawings stuck to refrigerators with alphabet magnets and lacy

Valentines from Guess Who. It ought to be filled with summer snapshots and report cards, ticket stubs and souvenirs, an encyclopedia and a library card, ice skates.

Instead, Maria's oral history flattened the features of Manny's geography into a landscape as drear as a back alley.

He was born in Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico to a mother who moved to Springfield and gave him to the state as she had his older sister and would his younger brother. For a time, it seemed that Manny and José would find a home, but the couple who took them divorced and gave them back. They were placed in a foster home and, although José stayed and grew up in that big family, Manny proved too much for his foster mother and once again he was returned to the bureaucracy charged with rescuing all the state's lost children.

"He spent a long time in a group home," Maria continued. "And he's been in two foster homes since then. He's lived with this last family for two years. Manny's in school now, but he has certain," she paused and looked at us with quiet eyes, "certain deficits... learning problems...no one's quite sure..." Her voice trailed off and her slender hands lay still on the pile of papers.

"I'll get you copies of the tests," she said. Then she brightened. "But you should meet him. He really is a special child. When you meet him, you'll be able to tell for yourselves."

October 18, 1984

Dear Annie:

I'll use this letter to you as one of my sounding boards. We met Manny yesterday.

It was shocking. I don't think I'd ever really absorbed the meaning of the word 'deprivation' until yesterday. Remember how we used to pray for the starving children in China and clean our plates

for them? Remember those Advent afternoons at the Convent of the Sacred Heart when we delivered cans of Campbell's soup to the feet of Our Lady to be doled out to poor families? Well, that's what I thought of when we saw Manny in his foster home.

Again Maria met us in Springfield. We were taken to offices, introduced to psychologists and teachers. We heard their opinions of where Manny had been and where he might go. Someone had written on one of his evaluations, "Manuel might succeed as a factory worker or an artist."

We drove to his residence, a brick building next to a church and a vacant lot. We walked up three flights of stairs to the apartment. Manny was sitting on the living room couch with his drawings on his lap. His foster parents welcomed us as best they could: they spoke no English. Manny spoke no Spanish.

Annie, he had been living in a home where they shared no common language! He might as well have been raised in a paper bag for two years.

Manny was tall and slim. His tight black curls were cut short. Long lashes framed his dark eyes. He looked handsome in his blue pants and striped t-shirt. He was obviously shy. He showed us his room. It was clean, tidy and completely empty. No books. No posters. No magazines. Manny, at Maria's urging, laid out his drawings. "I love art," he said. His foster parents beamed and nodded.

A small breeze lifted the sheer curtains at the window, brought up faint sounds of skateboards and someone shouting. All of us sat with our hands in our laps, smiling and nodding, making simple English sentences. At last we escaped for a walk to Forest Park, Maria's and Manny's favorite spot. We'd brought along our terrier Adelaide to break the ice and Manny was happily leading her on the

leash. We passed a car dealership with a red car in its wide window. Manny stopped to admire it.

"That's a Fiero," he announced. "I like Fieros."

"What do you think that car costs?" Charter asked him.

"Oh," Manny said, "It's very expensive. It must cost a hundred dollars. It's a Fiero. I like Fieros."

Only when we'd spent an hour in the city park did Manny begin to show us a little part of himself. He identified various birds by their calls. "I know my birds," he said when I praised him. Then he showed us the pond and the ducks and the little fish he called 'punkin seeds.' Yes, he liked to fish. Yes he liked the woods. Yes. I began to feel like an examiner, yet Manny was happy to respond to our attempts at conversation.

The adults we talked to spoke of him as a boy with "below average intelligence," but a kind kid, a nice kid. So what's "below average?" Is he just slow? Here we are presented with a boy who desperately needs a home, some stuff of his own, attention. We have no idea what we're in for, really, but who's to say some other kid wouldn't present problems? What should we do? Turn him down for a better model?

On the drive back, Charter and I questioned each other like we'd questioned Manny, only we didn't have his simple answers. What were his disabilities and could he overcome them at this age? How would a brown-skinned boy adapt in New Hampshire's bone-white society?

We were desperate to talk to someone. At Exit 41B we pulled off the highway and arrived unannounced at the home of our friends, Jan and Huck Keany. We spent the evening telling them about Manny; they themselves had adopted a son. They could only listen to our confusion with sympathy. Their son had not been easy to raise though they had got him as a baby.

We feel, in a crazy way, that Manny entering our lives was somehow the result of our seven years together, Bill's wonderful

talk with Charter, Manny speaking to us out of the TV. It's a very strange situation, and I expect it'll stay that way. We agreed to have Manny visit us next week. More later.

Maria drove Manny to our house in the woods. The kitchen was filled with the smell of apples and cinnamon. There was a fire in the cookstove.

We spent the afternoon alternately talking with Maria and showing Manny around. He and Charter went off to the garden, where late squash and pumpkin glowed among withering vines; then to the pond, with its wooden dock and aluminum canoe, the blue row boat missing an oar, the deflated inner tube and abandoned bait pail; then through the woods to the Isinglass River. Adelaide bounded along with them.

"So what do you think, Manny?" Charter asked as they finished that first walk. "Think you might like to try it out?"

"It's quiet here," he replied.

"Is that OK?"

"Oh yes. I like quiet. Noise," he said, "confuses me."

After setting Manny to stirring the pot of fragrant pink applesauce with a huge wooden spoon, I gave Maria a tour of the house. She took notes. "The Home Study," she explained. But her detailed report made no mention of an outhouse. "Why worry the bureaucrats?" It was suddenly clear to me that Maria Edwards had found a home for this the most problematic of her charges. Even if Charter and I had not made our final decision, she had.

"I'll deal with the paperwork. There should be no problems." There weren't...for us. When Maria later discovered that she had no jurisdiction in New Hampshire, she contacted a social worker in our

state, handed over her completed reports, and requested that they be authorized. The overworked young woman who visited us a few weeks later seemed a bit bemused, at a loss as to what more she needed to do. Evidently, aside from an hour of pleasant conversation, she was required to do very little but confirm Maria's findings. She wished us luck.

Manny visited over several more weekends that fall, each time settling further in. He met Warren and Jennifer's son Wesley and learned the twisting route of the 'bunny path' to his house. Wesley introduced him to the Anderson twins, Jacob and Jobriah, and to Samantha Bliss on whom Manny immediately developed a crush. They played together, sharing bikes and fishing rods. The community kids effortlessly incorporated his visits into their Saturdays.

It took me back to a day long ago when Willy and Sebastian, uprooted from one town and delivered to a new one, had stood on the front porch of the house, looked out over the neighborhood and said to me, "Where are the friends?"

"Over there, " I replied, and they set out to meet them.

Though, on the three hour car rides to and from Springfield, Manny was distressingly uncommunicative, his silences broken only by the appearance of a Fiero or some other flashy car (he knew the names of all of them), or by a tune on the radio (he knew them all, too), when he was at Scruton Pond Farm he expanded, like a dry sponge plunged in a pan of water.

He couldn't read, but he pored through our bird book, finding the chickadee and the goldfinch, searching out pictures of the

heron, purple finch, towhee, wood thrush, the ovenbird that said *Teacher Teacher Teacher*. He couldn't write much, but he left us notes with big letters and tortured spelling because we'd asked that he let us know where he was. (Copy a sample note here)

One weeknight, after a Manny visit, as Charter and I assessed for the hundredth time the implications of making Manny a permanent member of our household, the phone rang.

"Is this the family that has Manny? You don't know me," the woman began, "but I had to find your number and call. I'm Manny's bus driver in Springfield. He's been on my route for more than a year."

I couldn't imagine what she would tell us.

"For the longest time, I thought that boy was retarded. You know, he'd get on the bus, sit in the same seat, never talk, never even say good morning. He just rode. The other kids would pick on him once in a while, but even then he wouldn't respond. I felt real sorry for him."

My heart sank. The worst news had arrived. This woman knew the true story firsthand.

"But the other day--it was a Tuesday, I think--the most incredible thing happened."

I motioned to Charter to pick up the extension phone.

"Well Manny got on the bus as usual, but this time he stopped right by me. He seemed taller somehow. He looked me right in the eye and he said--loud, like an announcement--'I have a family, you know. I'm going to live with my new family any day now.' Then he sat himself down right behind me and repeated it, like to the whole

world."

My eyes filled.

"It was almost shocking, you know? I mean all these months I'd been seeing him every day, just taking him for granted, then all of a sudden I see this whole different kid. It was weird. I mean I don't know who you and your husband are, but all I can say is from where I sit, you've changed that boy's life."

On December 19, 1984, Maria Edwards delivered Manuel Cabrera to his new home. His clothes were packed in a beige nylon suitcase that Maria had given him as a present. Everything else he owned, all his possessions, fit into one cardboard box.